

HUNDREDS DIE IN EXPLOSION

St. Paul Coal Co.'s Mine at Cherry, Illinois, Is Scene of The Disaster.

TOWN FILLED WITH GRIEF.

Fire Started by Hay Allowed to Smoulder Too Long—Miners Realized Their Danger Too Late.

Ladd, Ill., Nov. 12.—At least 250 miners were killed here today in one of the worst mine horrors in years.

Twelve bodies tonight had been taken from the mine of the St. Paul Coal company, which was set on fire this afternoon by a burning bale of hay in the mule stable.

The men entombed number at least 250, according to the estimates of the mine officials, and that many can be rescued is beyond all possibility.

Tonight the shaft of the burning mine was sealed after efforts to extinguish the flames had proved futile.

The town tonight was a scene of grief and terror. Women and children were mourning and crying in the streets. Many wives whose husbands did not return from the fiery tomb were crazed with grief. Every family in the stricken town has felt the blow of the calamity.

The entrance to the mine was boarded over in an effort to check the flames. This ended all hope of escape by the imprisoned miners.

In the three veins, one 300 feet below the surface, the miners were imprisoned and their only chance for life was to retreat to the ends of the veins, in the hope there might be enough air to preserve their lives until help came.

The first explosion occurred shortly after 2 o'clock. It communicated to other sections of the mine, and in less than 10 minutes all hope of escape seemed shut off from the miners.

While smoke, and even jets of flame, swept up through the mine entrance, the cage which carried the miners to their work made regular trips. The first loads were miners who escaped with no worst injuries than burns or bruises received in the rush for safety.

Every year sees an increase in the consumption of Quaker Scotch Oats

The food that
makes strength

The last trip of the cage was made when the bodies of the mine superintendents and his assistants were brought out.

A half hour after the explosion occurred the mouth of the shaft was surrounded by hundreds of frantic women, children and men. Many tried to enter the mine, but gave up after the first effort and were carried unconscious from the smoke and escaping fumes. For almost two hours the officials of the mine and residents of Cherry tried to devise means to help the imprisoned miners.

Mine Supt. James Froese declared five hours after the explosion it was almost impossible that any of the miners could escape. The mine has a day shift of 450 men. Of these a few left the mine at noon. Twenty-five are known to have escaped after the fire broke out. The others doubtless are dead.

The entrance to the mine was sealed up in the hope of checking the flames. Despite the efforts of officials and scores of volunteer assistants, it seemed assured that only bodies of the dead would be taken from the mine.

The fire causing the explosion, in what may prove one of the greatest tragedies in the list of mine horrors, had an origin almost trivial. A pile of hay allowed to smoulder too long finally ignited the timbers of the mine and before the workers realized their danger the mine was filled with smoke, gases and flames and all exit was impossible.

No similar accident has been recorded in the history of mine disasters in Illinois.

The greatest loss of life in any mine accident in this state occurred at Braidwood in 1878, when 50 men lost their lives. At Zeigler, Ill., 50 men have been killed in successive mine accidents. There were 136,000 men employed in Illinois mines, and for the last fiscal year 181 were killed in accidents and 800 injured.

The greatest tragedy in mining history is believed to have occurred in Tokyo, Japan, in 1907, when 470 persons were killed.

The maximum loss of life in a mine disaster in the United States occurred at Monaca, W. Va., in 1907, when 328 miners were killed.

One of the miners who escaped from the Cherry mine said tonight:

"The lights went out soon after the fire started and left everything in darkness. When the alarm of fire was heard there was a rush for the escape and main shafts, but comparatively only a few could be seen. The smoke grew worse every minute. It will not be possible to save any of the imprisoned men."

EXPERTS BELIEVE FIRE HAS BEEN EXTINGUISHED

Cherry, Ill., Nov. 14.—Nearly 400 human beings, men and boys, it is now believed, are dead or perishing in the St. Paul mine here, though the experts who succeeded in penetrating the smoke-filled air shaft to the depth of 300 feet late today returned with a ray of hope for the grief-stricken relatives of the entombed men.

That the fire has been extinguished was the conclusion of mining experts and inspectors sent by Gov. Deneen to investigate the calamity.

For more than 30 hours the prisoners have been cut off from fresh air. That life could exist under such conditions is doubted, but because no trace of high temperature was found in the depths of the mine tonight, officials of the company hope the victims may have found safety in remote recesses of the workings.

A. J. Earling, president of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad company, who has not slept since arriving, received an encouraging report, after heroic efforts had been made to open the mine for the release of the entombed men, or for the recovery of the dead.

From the son of one of the missing miners, a young man named Reid, the railroad president heard that a concussion of the earth had been felt by farmers half a mile south of the main shaft. The report went to Henry Burke, an official of the mining company.

Burke rushed to President Earling in the office of the company.

"I've heard signals from the men," he said, excitedly.

"What do you mean," asked the railroad president. "What signals?"

"John Reid's boy says that he and farmers whose land is over the southern end of the mine felt several concussions of the earth this afternoon. There were several shocks, and the men who were in the mine were shaken to the ground."

"Oh, I hope so," said Earling. "That is at least encouraging."

This glimmering of light in the darkened homes of Cherry tonight followed other encouraging, though faint, theories of experts that the entombed hundreds may not have been suffocated and that oxygen enough remains in the mine to keep them alive until the shaft may be re-opened.

The list of missing was compiled today in the offices of the mining company. It reached 385, including the dead whose charred bodies were taken from burning cages Saturday afternoon. It was declared probable that this list might be increased.

One hundred and seventy men who entered the mine Saturday morning have been accounted for. The company had scores of tracers at work rounding up employees. Tonight company officials said the number of men in the mine was greater than they first had believed possible.

Among the missing are many Americans who have lived in the mining section of Illinois for years. Though the majority of those who may never be found alive are foreign-born, yet all had the homes here or the surrounding towns and villages. Grief over their probable fate has cast a pall over the community.

Cherry today held thousands of persons, and before noon the St. Paul mine was surrounded by an almost uncontrollable mob.

Officials early in the day swore in a force of deputies to handle the mob. Scores of trains from Streator, Mendota, Ladd, Spring Valley, La Salle, Ottawa and other towns were run.

When experts had drilled a hole through the concrete at the top of the second vein air shaft and all preparations were made to lower Mr. Williams and his volunteer explorers, the scene at the mine was dramatic. Along the railroad tracks and in fields on the east and west of the shaft was a wall of humanity. Stood ropes and policemen kept back the throngs.

It was a silent, but not undemonstrative assemblage. Occasionally a woman's wail broke the stillness. Four men appeared, oxygen bags, ladders, shovels and steel and glass covered heads over their heads. They were besides Mr. Williams of Urbana, his assistant, James H. Webb of the University of Illinois, James Hand of Spring Valley and Henry Smith of Peru. Later, Mine Inspector James Taylor of Peoria donned the regalia.

A score of men were ready to assist them. A system of signals had been prepared. Two men were stationed at the top of the shaft. Williams and Smith prepared to descend. Inspector Taylor drilled them in their signals.

The men who were to undertake the exploration nodded ascent. Engineer Cowley at the hoist that controlled the iron bucket in which Williams and Smith were standing announced his readiness, and the first men to enter the St. Paul mine since the explosion were slowly lowered.

SUPT. TAYLOR TALKS.

W. W. Taylor, general superintendent of the mines of the St. Paul company, was a pathetic figure today. He stood watching and suggesting movements to open the mine, and at times, though he struggled to control his emotions, tears dimmed his eyes and his voice choked with sobs.

"I wish," he said, "that the men of the press who interview the mining inspectors after they are relieved from their duties of this ordeal about this mine, I do not want to go on record alone, but I believe that they will tell you that this was the safest coal mine in this country. I have operated many mines and I know that it was safe."

A catastrophe could have happened here in no other way than just as it did. The fire need not have been disastrous. The men at work in the stables were excited. The burning hay could have been kept from the rest of the mine without the least difficulty, and the fire extinguished with little trouble.

"This is an awful thing. Some of the best men who ever lived lost their lives all through carelessness. Handy and Nosberg died like heroes. They were on the surface. They went down to save their fellows."

As Supt. Taylor spoke tears rolled down his cheeks. He has not slept since he reached here Saturday night. President Earling, too, deeply feels the tragedy. He and his son are constantly on the ground. Arrangements are being contemplated to bring relief to families of the victims. It is probable that supplies for their needs will be arranged by the St. Paul company.

Citizens of neighboring towns already appreciate, with the near approach of winter, what the catastrophe means to the inhabitants of Cherry. Not a home here has not been affected. Bread winners in hundreds of homes are dead.

Coroner Malm tomorrow will resume the inquest begun today.

Excitement ceased with the discontinuance of efforts to explore the mine and the disappearance of the great crowd. Preparations are being made for handling the dead when they are found.

STORY OF A SURVIVOR.

William Vickers, who was at work

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at the face of the mine, was one of the few who came out alive. For more than 200 yards he crawled in the dark on hands and knees, using the rail as a guide to the bottom of the shaft. At one point he says he met 65 miners sitting in a row along the road. They had given up the struggle and were waiting resignedly for death.

"I and my 'buddie' (partner) were at work on the second vein level when the alarm of fire was sounded," said Vickers. "We started from the bottom, but had gone only a few feet when our lights went out. The entry was fast filling with smoke, which filled our eyes and made us gasp for breath. Several times we attempted to light our lamps, but without success. All about us we could hear shouts of our comrades in adjoining rooms, who like ourselves, had been left in the dark. Calling to my 'buddie' I warned him to get close to the roadway, and I dropped to my hands and knees and began to crawl along the rails, shouting at intervals to my 'buddie' to let him know where I was."

"At one point we passed about 65 miners sitting by the roadside, almost all of them dead. I tried to rouse them and encourage them to go on, but they seemed to have given up all hope and did not stir. I had no time to lose and continued on, expecting to find relief from the shaft."

"When within 100 feet of the mine mouth, I began to grow faint from the effects of smoke and exhaustion. The smoke was growing more dense every foot I went, and my courage was fast ebbing. I pulled my coat closely about my face and, bending closely to the rail, struggled on."

"I escaped death by just three minutes. When I arrived at the bottom of the shaft the last cage had reached the top and was about to descend. I shouted as the signal bell was ringing and two men broke the way to me and dragged me to the cage. I then lost consciousness. When I came to I was safely on top."

"My 'buddie' had followed closely all the way and had, encouraged by the light held by the cage man, managed to reach the shaft and was carried with me to safety."

A tobacco pouch was the means of saving the lives of John Phillips and Edward Surrock, miners in the second vein. Phillips, on the way to the shaft, found Surrock lying in the track in the main entry where he dragged his comrade, and he, himself, was almost overcome with the smoke.

With a miner's intuition he searched for something to cover his nose and mouth. The only thing available was the small sack in which he carried tobacco. Placing one end in his mouth, he pulled the rest over his nose and fastened it about his head with the string. By crawling with his head close to the rail he struggled toward the shaft, dragging his almost lifeless comrade with him.

One of the heroic incidents of the rescue work was the saving of John McGill and his young son. They left the place where they were working when the alarm was given. Before half the journey was completed, the boy began to grow dizzy. Crying, his father's hand he succumbed to his knees, exclaiming, "Pa, I am dying. Leave me and save yourself if you can."

Although greatly weakened himself, the father raised the now unconscious son and, taking off his belt, strapped the boy on his back and struggled on. Within sight of the shaft he staggered and fell. Before losing consciousness he yelled for help, and his cries were heard. Rescuers bore him to the cage.

Eleven of the 12 boarders at the house of Mrs. George White were lost. The only survivor was an invalid, who, on Monday, returned from the hospital and was unable to report for work on Saturday.

One pitiful case is that of the Love family. Mrs. John Love is not only left a widow, but four sons are believed to have perished.

A canvass of what is known as "Long Row," a street which has on one side a row of 33 cottages identical in appearance, has revealed that only two men in all the houses are numbered among the living. Each of the 33 families has from one to four dead.

The story of the 12 heroes who went down to their death in the blazing shaft of the Cherry mine and of the one man who came back, scarred by fire and blackened by smoke, to tell the ghastly story, is being related today in all its details.

MAN WHO CAME BACK.

Standing out above all the others is the story of Dr. L. B. Howe, "the man who came back." The only one of the heroic 14 who survived to tell what happened.

Seven times before the other rescuers began to go down in the burning shaft, he went down alone in a lift. Each time he brought to the surface his quota of saved. Twenty-five miners owe their lives to him.

Today his hands are badly burned, but he shows no other scar. When asked to describe his experience, he merely shrugged his shoulders and said:

"I couldn't have done anything else than I did. It is not worth talking about. Besides, I am too busy to talk today."

The disaster brought to light many unnamed heroes. Among these was a miner who, when feeling his way through the blinding smoke, stumbled across the body of a little "trapper" boy who had been overcome at his post at one of the trap doors that control the air supply. Finding that life still existed he picked up the boy, and, placing him upon his shoulders, staggered on until he met one of the rescuers. Both the miner and the boy reached the surface.

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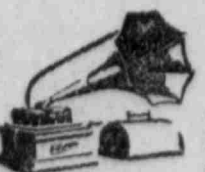
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